

VZCZCXYZ0000  
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHFN #0336/01 2391739  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 271739Z AUG 09  
FM AMEMBASSY FREETOWN  
TO RHMFIUU/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE PRIORITY  
RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2843

UNCLAS FREETOWN 000336

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [MASS](#) [MCAP](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [OVIP](#) [SL](#)  
SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR GENERAL WARD'S VISIT

¶1. (U) Post warmly welcomes you to Sierra Leone. Your visit comes at a prescient time, and will hopefully support increasingly robust engagement on a variety of issues, including the pending Status of Forces Agreement. Sierra Leone is known worldwide as a country beset with challenges, many of which are the result of the brutal decade-long civil war that destroyed infrastructure and truncated political, social, and economic development. The country currently sits last on the UN's Human Development Index due to high unemployment, the worst mother-child mortality rates in the world, and widespread illiteracy. Despite this background, however, Sierra Leone is of significant strategic interest to the USG:

- It is among the most stable in the region, and instrumental in helping to maintain sub-regional peace and security;
- The Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces is providing a reconnaissance company to the United Nations Mission to Darfur (UNAMID) in November 2009. They would like to provide a battalion to the same mission in 2010;
- Sierra Leone is a model for post-conflict reconstruction, one of two countries chosen for the UN's pilot Peace Building program;
- The 2007 Presidential Elections and 2008 Local Council Elections, judged free and fair by international observers, occurred with limited violence and peaceful transitions. These elections are considered a model for the continent;
- Sierra Leone is an ally with the USG on critical issues. For example, the Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) immediately and publicly recognized Kosovo's independence following its secession;
- The GoSL is becoming a leader in international forums, such as the AU and the UN, and is promoting human rights issues through multilateral engagement. Sierra Leone co-sponsored the U.S. Zimbabwe Resolution, and was one of few African countries to make public statements against the violence there;
- There is strong political will to combat narcotics trafficking in Sierra Leone and throughout the sub-region;
- Despite the pervasive culture of corruption, the GoSL has taken significant steps to combat it, including passing one of the toughest anti-corruption laws in Africa;
- The GoSL is actively engaged in assisting with counter-terrorism efforts.

¶2. (SBU) Though the GoSL is making strong attempts to escape the "Blood Diamond" branding and soar as a regional leader in democracy, human rights, and governance, the country is highly vulnerable to failure. Economic, social, internal, and regional insecurity, coupled with insufficient capacity, have a negative impact on progress. It would not be in the USG

interest to have GoSL efforts falter, impacting our bilateral and multilateral relations and priorities. Picking up the pieces after another bloody conflict would be more costly than to fully provide assistance so desperately needed now.

13. (SBU) The following issues are of critical concern to USG interests:

a) Economic Insecurity - The civil war destroyed the country's infrastructure, including physical and human capital, and the process of rebuilding is a long and arduous one. A country known for its natural resources has neither the capability to effectively harness them nor the capacity to regulate others intent on exploiting them. Unemployment is estimated at 70%, with no industrial or manufacturing employment prospects for unskilled and skilled workers. The borders of the formal economy are constantly receding to make way for the informal, where regulation, taxation, and legitimacy are non-existent. In this environment, poverty is an endemic killer. A nation rendered fragile by the impacts of war feels external market shocks more keenly. The currency has recently been devaluing at a rapid pace due to limited foreign exchange, making it even harder to meet the demands of the import-reliant market. A further downward slide could destabilize the country, and the current level of desperation creates opportunities for heightened criminal activity, and bilateral assistance requests to countries' whose true motives are unknown.

b) Regional Insecurity - Though Cote d'Ivoire and Liberia are persevering in their struggles to rebuild after their respective conflicts, the situation in Guinea appears to be ever-worsening. Given the porous nature of Sierra Leone's borders with its neighboring states, as well as the close historic, familial, and economic ties between them, insecurity in one country quickly spills over into another. For Sierra Leone, the Mano River Union's (MRU) current bastion of peace, heightened tensions in Guinea drive people over the border, though Sierra Leone has no capacity to support refugees. An increase in organized crime in one country can also lead to an upswing in similar activity in another, and smuggling contraband such as narcotics and arms is known to occur throughout the MRU. External forces such as these threaten Sierra Leone's fragile internal security. Through the Department of Defense, the USG works strenuously with the military and larger security sector to build capacity to protect Sierra Leone's land and coastal borders.

c) Internal Insecurity - Economic hardships are a significant destabilizing force. The massive unemployment, particularly among the nation's youth population whose education was interrupted by war, leaves many angry and idle individuals more than willing to make mischief or worse. Easily manipulated, the "unemployed youth" cohort is responsible for political violence and petty and violent crime. The Sierra Leone Police, riddled with systemic corruption, hampered by virtually no resources, and lacking the most basic training and equipment, is poorly matched against a hungry population already sensitized to brutality. Though a peaceful country at the moment, battle fatigue could dissipate as economic deprivation worsens. If the delicate balance supporting stability wavers, the GoSL has few resources with which to quell violence and insurgency. The USG supports training initiatives for the police, and the Embassy hopes to provide additional technical assistance in FY09.

d) Narcotics - An element of both regional and internal insecurity concerns, narcotics trafficking through Sierra Leone to Europe is on the rise. The largest cocaine bust in the country's history took place in July, 2008, netting over 700kg. of premium cocaine and 21 suspects of Sierra Leonean, South American, and American citizenship. The size and sophistication of this trafficking attempt indicates a well-organized syndicate which has likely used Sierra Leone as a staging ground for its criminal activity in the past. The court case against the 15 individuals charged with drugs crimes ended in April, 2009, with guilty pleas across the board. The GoSL expelled three individuals into USG custody

to face pending indictments in the Southern District of New York. Despite these positive steps, the fragility of the governance and judicial structures, coupled with economic insecurity, makes Sierra Leone highly vulnerable for further narcotics trafficking, especially as USG and others focus on neighboring countries. Without constant vigilance, Sierra Leone is at-risk for increased organized crime. AFRICOM CNT funding is currently being used to provide equipment to the country's Joint Drug Interdiction Task Force, and further funding from several USG agencies over the next two fiscal years. AFRICOM CNT is also providing assistance to the Maritime Wing: training to improve law enforcement capabilities and spare parts for the three Dauntless Class Coast Guard Cutters will enhance patrolling efforts in Sierra Leone's protected waters that are rife with drug-runners and illegal fishing vessels.

e) Anti-Corruption - The President made a "zero tolerance for corruption" campaign pledge in 2007, and made good on that promise during his first year in office. Placing great confidence in Abdul Tejan-Cole, new Commissioner of the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), the President has supported a revamping of the ACC organization, the passage of a revised Anti-Corruption Act (signed into law September 1, 2008), became the first Sierra Leonean Head of State to declare his assets, and forced every ministry to include anti-corruption activities in their missions and strategic plans. The ACC is actively investigating and prosecuting prominent current and former government officials. The Embassy liaises regularly with the ACC, and plans to support training and technical assistance in the areas of forensic accounting and extraditions.

f) Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) - Having languished on various GoSL desks for several years, signing the SOFA agreement is a current Embassy concern. The issue has been raised at the highest levels, and some progress has been made. Finalizing this agreement is a critical priority for the USG, and a team of lawyers from AFRICOM are expected in September to assist with revising the agreement, which will then be negotiated and finalized.

g) Peace Corps - The Peace Corps is expected to return in June, 2010, following its departure during the conflict years. The GoSL is an enthusiastic bilateral partner in this endeavor, and the volunteers' efforts will likely be focused in the areas of education, agriculture and health.

h) USG Assistance - Assistance efforts focus on building institutional capacities through: strengthening good governance and consolidating peace and security through democratic political processes; supporting economic growth and private sector investment, particularly in the productive agriculture and natural resources sectors; and, reducing food insecurity and increasing the standard of living through developmental food aid. USAID is just starting to implement the Promoting Agriculture, Governance and Environment Program (PAGE) as a means to assist Sierra Leone in promoting good governance and transparency while also impacting agricultural and environmental productivity and increased access to markets. This is a 4-year \$13 million project. Although not a PEPFAR country, Sierra Leone was the recipient of \$500,000 in FY08 for HIV/AIDS education for awareness building around prevention and treatment and to strengthen the health system for improved and reliable HIV/STD surveillance assessment. The Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces also benefited in FY08 with a \$400,000 Department of Defense HIV/AIDS Program (DHAPP). The Program focused on HIV/AIDS prevention activities for African militaries. Other USG assistance efforts include funding for trafficking in persons, child labor, refugee assistance, special self-help grants to communities, and IMET.

14. (SBU) Assessment of Military Priorities: The DAO has identified the following Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces priorities: building peacekeeping capacity for United Nations and African Union Missions in Africa; building

seamanship, and law enforcement and interdiction skills for enhancing maritime security and domain awareness in protected waters; strengthening HIV/AIDS prevention strategies and promoting a fit and healthy military; building the leadership, management, and technical skills of a professional military that is respectful of civil authority and good governance; and strengthening concepts, strategies, and military education to build a strong NCO corps.

PERRY